THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION
Nurturing creativity and innovation
MumLife Australia inspires, empowers and supports a growing community of mums by sharing information that’s normally only available to practitioners, educators and academics.

Whilst there’s no single answer to every question, empowering mums with evidence-based practical information allows them to make informed parenting decisions to suit their family circumstances.

Founded in October 2015, MumLife Australia is for the inquisitive, informed and interested mum.

If it takes a village to raise a child, MumLife Australia is your Tribe
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AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING AUTHORITY (ACARA)

The ACARA is an independent statutory authority that will improve the learning of all young Australians through world-class school curriculum, assessment and reporting programs. The Australian Curriculum sets consistent high standards for what all young Australians should learn as they progress through schooling. It prepares Australia’s next generation for the future and lays the building blocks for generations to come. It facilitates national collaboration to develop and share high quality resources and teaching practices.

IB SCHOOLS AUSTRALASIA

IB Schools Australasia (Formerly AAIBS) was established specifically to assist IB World schools, providing a network of professional support, information and service. The association also organises an annual speaker series and supports co-branded professional development workshops run by the IB Asia Pacific office. The association is a not for profit organisation run by an elected standing committee of leaders in IB World schools who volunteer their time and expertise to support and further the IB mission in Australasia.
CONTRIBUTORS.

MONTESSORI AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION
The Montessori Australia Foundation is the Australian peak national body for Montessori. MAF is a registered charity providing support services to Montessori schools, teachers and parents. MAF maintains communication with all Australian Montessori programmes and acts as a clearinghouse for Montessori information and communication.

STEINER EDUCATION AUSTRALIA (SEA)
Steiner Education Australia is the peak body for representing over 40 Steiner/Waldorf schools and 10 Associate members throughout the states and territories of Australia. SEA supports, advocates, promotes and represents the free and healthy development of Steiner education in contemporary, diverse contexts.

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RACHEL’S HOME EDUCATION ADVICE QUEENSLAND
UNSCHOOLING DOWN UNDER
Rachael Clark has been home educating over the last 6 years and is passionate about sharing her extensive knowledge on home education. After graduating from the University of Queensland she spent 10 years in research roles within the Mater Mothers Hospital and then 10 years in State Government management developing policy. Rachael spends most of her time at home running her Bowen Therapy business, while also connecting, learning and having fun with her family, and helping others with their own homeschool concerns.
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INTRODUCTION.

Schools as we understand them have existed in Australia for more than 200 years. For a long time, this standards-based system that focussed on academic ability served us well - after all, the system was designed during the industrial revolution where standardised testing was a convenient way to evaluate large numbers of students quickly.

Fast forward to the 21st century and a university degree no longer guarantees a good career and a comfortable lifestyle. For the last two years, only 68% of Australian bachelor graduates had a full-time job 4 months after graduating (as compared to the long term average of 81% for the past three decades).

Add to that the fact that many high school students no longer believe that a university degree is necessary. After all, Steve Jobs dropped out of college after six months, Mark Zuckerberg did the same his sophomore year, and Richard Branson - he never even graduated high school.

Perhaps these students are onto something.

After all, how many of the jobs that exist today will even be around in 10, 15 or 20 years time?

With a future that’s not yet imaginable, how can schools prepare and educate this generation’s students for LIFE?

On the one hand, memorising knowledge and recalling that information on demand is not a bad skill to have. However, it’s one perhaps more suited for students entering a knowledge worker economy rather than those embarking on an age of technological unemployment.

In the near future truck drivers will no longer be required because cars will start driving themselves. Manufacturing will no longer require human input as digital printing becomes more mainstream. Customer service operators will be replaced by automated intelligent assistants using the same technology as Apple’s Siri.

So what skills will define the success of this generation’s students? How will we prepare them for a new age where the creators, discoverers and innovators will flourish? How can we encourage entrepreneurism in a world heavy on technology and light on labour?

At its very core we need to move from an education system focussed on academic ability to one that fosters a love of learning. We need to encourage problem solving, creativity and risk-taking. We need to personalise education in a way that no longer batches students by age but rather focuses on each student’s individual learning style and interests.

We need to prepare students for a new age.

We need to teach them for life.

That’s the education revolution we need.

Ani Tuna

Founder + Editor
MumLife Australia
"CREATIVITY NOW IS AS IMPORTANT IN EDUCATION AS LITERACY, AND WE SHOULD TREAT IT WITH THE SAME STATUS"

SIR KEN ROBINSON
THE 'ENGAGE ME' FACTOR

“A teacher’s purpose is not to create students in their own image, but to engage students so that they can create their own.” Author Unknown

BY ROD SOPER

Education has one purpose and that is to engage. Engage minds with the wonders of the world. Engage creative thinking so that the world can be explored confidently and curiously. Engage in community mindedness so that purpose-filled lives and transformational relationships which inspire growth, innovation and allow each individual’s dreams to become a reality.

That is the purpose of real education. That is the purpose of education in Australia. The revolution is not a 'stuff full' mentality but rather active, purpose filled engagement! I call it the 'engage me' factor.

Our education system needs teachers who are passionate about truly engaging with students, whatever their age and whatever their capacity. To get over themselves and the path of least resistance and embark on the road less traveled; a pathway that engages with the question, how have you been changed?

This mindfulness applies in every setting, starting with engaging early learners in creative thinking as they explore their natural environments. To primary school students who are wanting to explore the order of the world around them. To the high school students who are trying to make
sense of their identity and position in their community. To the university students who are looking ahead into the future wanting to explore new possibilities so that their lives have a sense of purpose and meaning.

Teachers, who facilitate, lead and lend a hand to realise engagement always, 100% of the time, participate in the transformation of individuals, groups, communities and nations. Therefore educators need to have this skill above every other one. They must ask the most important question every day: How have I engaged you in your passions, so that you are changed?

In my experience, as a teacher for the last two decades and a Principal for the past five years resonates and provides countless samples of evidence to support this. I have taught preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary and profession development education, and in every setting the ‘engage me’ factor has exactly the same effect; engage the learner and every outcome, individual or corporate, can be successfully met at every level.

Teachers and parents who truly utilise the ‘engage me’ factor know it has global impact for the whole person. Engagement changes thinking, it changes behavior, it changes participation in relationships and learning. It changes curiosity about the process and instills a fascination about the product.

Our education system needs teachers who are passionate about truly engaging with students, whatever their age and whatever their capacity.

WHOA AND WHAT DOES THE ‘ENGAGE ME’ FACTOR INFLUENCE?

If you have a student who is acting out engage with them in learning where their passions are active, then behavior will change - there is simply no time to be disengaged any more.

Test this out!

If you have people in your world who are falling out of relationship, engage with them about the world in which they are passionate and see relationships change for good - there is simply no time to be distracted.

If you have a group of students who are bored and are not interested then look at your own pedagogy and measure its ‘engage me’ quality. Take the textbook for instance! - Is the way you are using it genuinely boring? Ask yourself, are you activating the naughty in learners by boring them to distraction?
When we are engaged so is our thinking, our attention is focused, our connections with people and places are strong and our behavior is balanced and on task. As one student put it to me, “Please, have the skills to engage me and we’ll do the rest together and change the world!” Student aged 43!

As teachers look for their students passions and interests first and foremost and then engage them around a curriculum they will see the change; learning which is deep personal and life long.

I dare you, give it a go and be a part of what happens.

At the end of the day, education is not about you, it’s not about a curriculum, it’s about engaging the learner. It is not surprising then to learn that the Latin root for the word education is educere, which simply put, means to draw out and then lead forth.

If teachers are truly doing their job they must first engage students with what they are passionate about and then find somewhere awesome to go with them. Whether that is a point from a curriculum or an element of content, it is the teacher’s mantra. It is our purpose.

SO HOW DO WE ACTIVATE THE ‘ENGAGE ME’ FACTOR?

Three steps.

Step one, build relationships that last and have the purpose of discovering passion and inspiration. Find that thing which really sets them up in their element.

Step two, using your deep pedagogical knowledge and skills to collaboratively connect with curriculum and inspiration, engage the student’s passion and their natural curious desire with key aspects you want to guide them in.

Step three, keep the students passion alive by fanning their interest into an all-consuming flame - we want them to burn for learning while simultaneously growing in understanding of curriculum content and its application in creative and critical thinking.

The ‘engage me’ factor is driven by the students and guided and further fuelled by great pedagogists.

HOW CAN PARENTS AND FAMILIES CONNECT WITH THE ‘ENGAGE ME’ FACTOR?

This is very easy - show your children how to be curious about everything.

Parents need to develop a curiosity habit in their child by finding everything interesting. This habit is built through curious questions which help explore the world in new and innovative ways.

This habit is built through curious questions which help explore the world in new and innovative ways.

Here are a few examples of curious questions: I wonder where that idea came from? That looks amazing, tell me all about? Can you help me understand what you have found interesting? How did you do that? Where did you learn about that? I am really impressed with your thinking, are there any other ideas you can tell me about?

Being curious or finding everything interesting means that each opportunity to explore the world turns out to be a prospect to become deeply engaged. It is about drawing out the capacity of your child and going somewhere exciting with it. So work as hard as you can to develop this curiosity habit in your learner.

One last reminder … The ‘engage me’ factor is in all of us. It is a desire we all have and long to have activated.

As teachers and parents, when we actively work with the ‘engage me’ factor we will have learners who are shifting their thinking, growing their language possibilities and boundaries, building their attention and strengthening their bodies and soul.

So at every opportunity you have as a teacher or parent, I implore you to find everything interesting, help another to discover the curiousness of every day and never let another moment go past where we take an engaged mind for granted.
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING IN THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

JULIA KING, ACARA
Critical and creative thinking is one of the seven general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. Students develop critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems.

- Developing a range of thinking skills including systems thinking, design thinking and computational thinking (that is, critical and creative thinking).

In the Technologies learning area students develop critical and creative thinking as they imagine, generate, develop and critically evaluate ideas.

Students think critically and creatively about possible, probable and preferred futures. They consider how data, information, systems, materials, tools and equipment (past and present) impact on our lives, and how these elements might be better designed and managed.

“Responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century – with its complex environmental, social and economic pressures – requires young people to be creative, innovative, enterprising and adaptable, with the motivation, confidence and skills to use critical and creative thinking purposefully.” - ACARA, 2014

This is strongly evident in the Technologies learning area which comprises two distinct but related subjects:

1. Design and Technologies
2. Digital technologies.

The key ideas behind both subjects are:

- Creating preferred futures - that is, considering how solutions that are created now will be used in the future
- Learning how to manage projects

They develop reasoning and the capacity for abstraction through challenging problems that do not have straightforward solutions.

Students analyse problems, refine concepts and reflect on the decision-making process by engaging in systems, design and computational thinking.

They identify, explore and clarify technologies information and use that knowledge in a range of situations.

Experimenting, drawing, modelling, designing and working with digital tools, equipment and software helps students to build their visual and spatial thinking and to create solutions, products, services and environments.

In essence, the key ideas of the Technologies learning area contribute to developing general capabilities for lifelong learning. In doing so it prepares Australia’s next generation for the future and lays the building blocks for generations to come.
INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE: A GLOBAL EDUCATION

ASHLEY COATS
CHAIR, IB SCHOOLS AUSTRALASIA
HEAD OF MIDDLE SCHOOL, MERCEDES COLLEGE, ADELAIDE

The number of Australian schools offering International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes is steadily increasing.

In fact, Australia is currently the fourth largest country of IB Schools worldwide (and that doesn’t include the many candidate schools who have begun the process to become authorised IB World Schools).

So why are so many Australian schools and parents drawn to IB education? There are many contributing factors. But one that particularly stands out is that IB education is a global standard of education that looks to promote international mindedness and intercultural awareness. Its mission is to nurture global citizens who’ll make the world a better place and its method is to use inquiry based learning to produce lifelong independent learners who are prepared for whatever the future holds.

The IB programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

While the 4 programmes of the IB are quite distinct, they also have many common
“Learning in the 21st century must go beyond disciplinary understanding”

threads like the IB Learner Profile, which is a set of 10 attributes that encourages creativity, risk-taking, innovation and problem-solving skills.

The IB programmes also identify five approaches to learning - thus recognising that learning in the 21st century must go beyond disciplinary understanding if it is to be relevant for the ever-changing job market that its students will be competing in and contributing to.

FOUR IB PROGRAMMES
The IB programmes are designed as a continuum of education, with students choosing between the Diploma and the Career-Related Programmes in their final two years of education.

However, all programmes can be (and are) successfully undertaken in isolation of each other.

PRIMARY YEARS PROGRAMME
Designed for students aged 3 to 12.

Focusses on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom and in the world outside.

MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME
Designed for students aged 11 to 16.

Focusses on life-skills, establishing identity and building self-esteem. Offers students an opportunity to develop their potential, explore their own learning preferences and to take appropriate risks.
DIPLOMA PROGRAMME
Designed for students aged 16 to 19. Provides a challenging, internationally focused, broad and balanced educational experience.

Students are required to study six subjects and a curriculum core concurrently over two years. The programme is designed to equip students with the basic academic skills needed for university study, further education and for engaging in an increasingly global and changing world.

"In many instances, students can gain status in their first year university courses for some higher level Diploma Programme subjects"

CAREER-RELATED PROGRAMME
Offered as an alternative to the Diploma Programme, the Career-Related Programme was developed to address the needs of students interested in pursuing a career-related education at the upper secondary school level.

The Programme provides the basis for effective participation in the changing world of work, improved mobility and flexibility in employment, additional training, further education, and lifelong learning.

The Career Related Programme can lead to apprenticeships, TAFE courses and indeed university courses, especially courses like engineering, nursing and health related courses, and Arts dedicated institutions.

TRANSITION
Although the IB programmes are designed as a continuum of education, all programmes can be (and are) successfully undertaken in isolation of each other.

For example, the nature of teaching and learning in the Primary Years Programme is concept-based, transdisciplinary and largely taught by a single classroom teacher. Where students transition from the Primary Years Programme to a state–based curriculum, the continuity of their education is dependent on a large number of variables that include what state they are in, what school system they are entering, the resources of the particular school, the resources and experience of the teachers at that particular school.

IB EDUCATION FOR ALL
Both the Primary Years and Middle Years Programmes cater for all students, all types of learners and all types of cultures and religions with understanding and appreciation.

The Diploma and Career Related programmes are designed to cater for different learners in the senior years according to their strengths, learning styles and career aspirations.

UNIVERSITY ENTRY
There are very few (if any) barriers to entry to Australian universities for those who have completed the Diploma Programme.

In fact, universities often seek out Diploma Programme students and even offer students who receive outstanding results, scholarships and other incentives.

The conversion from the Diploma Programme result to an ATAR currently varies between the States, however, the IB Asia Pacific office is constantly negotiating with universities in Australia about acceptance of Diploma Programme students.

IB LEARNER PROFILE
IB learners strive to be:

INQUIRINGERS
Curious, learn with enthusiasm

KNOWLEDGEABLE
In-depth understanding

THINKERS
Critical, creative and use initiative

COMMUNICATORS
Collaborate effectively, multilingual

PRINCIPLED
Honest, fair and take responsibility

OPEN-MINDED
Recognise different perspectives exist

CARING
Show empathy and compassion

RISK-TAKERS
Explore innovative strategies, resourceful, resilient

BALANCED
Balance different aspects of life

REFLECTIVE
Understand our strengths and weaknesses
MONTESSORI - DEVELOPING THE CREATIVE ELITE

What do Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, television chef Julia Child and music mogul Sean ‘P Diddy’ Combs have in common? They are all Montessori alumni.

In 2011 the Wall Street Journal published an article titled The Montessori Mafia. In that article, writer Peter Sims, highlighted a six-year study in which it was discovered that a disproportionate number of entrepreneurs starting new businesses and inventing new products were Montessori alumni.

In fact, it’s well known that Google co-founder, Larry Page, credits much of his success to his Montessori education.

“I think it was part of that training of not following rules and orders, and being self motivated, questioning what’s going on in the world and doing things a little bit differently” – Sergrey Brin, Google

The article also describes the role Montessori has had in developing the creative elite, which Sims also recognises as being overrepresented by the school’s alumni, including video game pioneer Will Wright, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, writer Anne Frank, chef Julia Child and music producer Sean ‘P Diddy’ Combs.

There is no doubt that interest in Montessori education in Australia is growing. Currently there are over 210 Montessori schools and centres nationwide.

What is Montessori education?

Dr María Montessori studied children of all ethnic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds for over fifty years. Her intense scientific observation of the human being from birth to maturity allowed her to distil a body of philosophical, psychological and pedagogical principles. These, together with a vast range of auto-didactic materials, came to be known as Montessori Education.

The Montessori approach offers a broad vision of education as an “aid to life”. The classrooms provide a prepared environment where children are free to respond to their natural tendency to work. The children’s innate passion for learning is encouraged by giving them opportunities to engage in spontaneous, purposeful activities with the guidance of a trained adult.

Through their work, the children develop concentration and joyful
self-discipline. Within a framework of order, the children progress at their own pace and rhythm, according to their individual capabilities.

**What distinguishes the Montessori method from traditional methods of teaching?**

Rather than being about the transfer of a national curriculum, the Montessori approach aims to aid the child's innate potential for development. This includes providing an environment within which the child learns at their own pace, by pursuing their own individual interests.

Montessori is ‘child-centred’ meaning that the child is the active participant in their learning, teaching themselves by using hands-on materials specifically designed for the purpose.

This process of self-discovery brings the child a deep sense of satisfaction and reward, motivating the child and instilling a joy in the activity of learning.

**The Montessori classroom**

Children are free to move around in a Montessori classroom. They can work where they are comfortable, at a table or on a work mat on the floor. They are also able to talk whilst not disturbing others. There are long periods of uninterrupted time for exploration in order to promote concentration and learning at a deep level.

The way in which Montessori classrooms operate, encourage internal self-discipline. There is only one of each type of material in the classroom which means that the child must wait for their turn. The children collaborate with the teacher to maintain the classroom’s beauty and orderliness.

Everything in the Montessori classroom is designed to promote the child’s independent use and success.

Montessori focuses not only on intellectual or academic development, but also upon the emotional and social skills. Classrooms are organised in 3 year mixed age groups. This promotes peer learning and cooperation between children. Each classroom is like a microcosm of the world, a small learning community.

**Is there a particular ‘type’ of child who is suited to Montessori education?**

Montessori fosters the natural human development of all children. However, it may not necessarily be the right fit for all parents. Montessori fits with what has become known as an authoritative parenting style.

This parenting style offers the child structure, rules and provides discipline, balanced with emotional warmth, communication, respect and love. In Montessori we support the child’s freedom within developmentally appropriate limits, rather than giving the child license to explore without boundaries. When the style of parenting experienced by the child does not align with the Montessori approach, it can be very difficult for the Montessori programme to support the child’s optimal development.

**If children are guided by their interests, how do Montessori schools ensure that children receive a well-rounded education?**

Montessori children are free to choose their work within limits, and are given only as much freedom as they can handle with appropriate responsibility. Montessori teachers spend time observing each child for information about their stage of development and readiness for extension. Detailed records are maintained regarding the materials the child has worked with each day and the developmental acquisitions they have made. The teacher then introduces the child to the next set of learning materials based on their observed needs. Montessori teachers use observation and record keeping to ensure that each child is progressing at their appropriate pace in all areas of development.

**Transition from Montessori education to traditional education later in life**

When Dr. Montessori spoke of ‘education for life’ she meant preparing a child for the myriad experiences he or she will encounter, both in and outside of school, which of course includes moving from a Montessori primary classroom into high school.

A child who’s been in a Montessori classroom since age 3 has had many years of daily practise in working cooperatively, negotiation with peers; being a leader or a follower, depending on the requirements of the situation; and learning how to learn.

If a child leaves a Montessori pre-school (ages 3-6) class to begin in a traditional primary school, this is a natural transitional point. All children will be new to the primary level and will be adjusting to changes in routine and method. Similarly, a child leaving Montessori primary at age 12 to attend high school will be leaving at a natural transition point. Again, all the children will be new to high school and the different routines and expectations there.

"This process of self-discovery brings the child a deep sense of satisfaction and reward, motivating the child and instilling a joy in the activity of learning."
A child leaving in the middle of the primary years is likely to experience the most "difference", both in teaching methods and classroom routines.

Some differences a primary child might have to adapt to include remaining seated in class, working on a lesson or activity with the entire class or a large group, using books and paper but no manipulative materials, and having work choices made by someone else (often the teacher). There may be, generally, fewer opportunities for a child to make choices for him or herself in the new setting.

During a child’s final Montessori primary years, he or she develops a greater level of abstraction with academic subjects and moves away from using the materials. At the same time he or she will be guided in improving planning and organisational skills, developing familiarity with standardised testing as appropriate, and working to a deadline. These skills will assist with the transition to high school.

Montessori graduates typically say they have been well prepared academically, and have the ability to organise themselves and work independently.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT

Choosing the right Montessori environment for your child is important. Each school, centre or programme is run independently from the Montessori Australia Foundation and is either privately owned, part of a public school, or run by a non-profit association.

“Montessori” is not trademarked so it is possible for any school or centre to include the word “Montessori” in their name. Most “Montessori” schools or centres aim to offer a quality Montessori programme.

A national Montessori Quality Assurance Programme has been established to identify the Quality Standards for Montessori programmes and to support schools and centres in maintaining these standards.

It’s recommended that parents ask to be able to observe in the classroom in which they are considering enrolling their child.

The following points relate to the quality standards in the Montessori Quality Assurance Programme:

- Trained Montessori teacher with qualifications for the age level they teach
- Multi-age groupings aligned with the progressive stages of human development e.g. birth to walking; walking to 3 years; 3 to 6 years; 6 to 12 years; 12 to 15 years; 15 to 18 years.
- Uninterrupted daily work periods, with 3 hours as the ideal
- A full compliment of Montessori materials, resources and activities appropriate for the developmental stage of the children
- The classroom is well-maintained, ordered and enticing independence, self-direction, active-learning and discovery are encouraged.
RUDOLF STEINER:

WE SHOULDN’T ASK “WHAT DOES A PERSON NEED TO BE ABLE TO DO IN ORDER TO FIT INTO THE EXISTING SOCIAL ORDER TODAY?”

INSTEAD WE SHOULD ASK “WHAT LIVES IN EACH HUMAN BEING AND WHAT CAN BE DEVELOPED IN HIM OR HER?”
THE STEINER APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Steiner education is a popular choice of alternative schooling in Australia. There are currently more than 40 Steiner schools in Australia.

So, what is Steiner education?

Steiner education is based on a holistic approach, designed to provide a balance of intellectual, artistic, imaginative capacities and practical life skills. The Steiner curriculum, recognised by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, is aligned heavily with the development stages of the child.

According to Tracey Sayn Wittgenstein Piraccini, CEO of Steiner Education Australia (SEA), teachers working in Steiner schools see students capacity to learn in three main stages:

- imitation in the early childhood years and focus on child directed play

- imagination in the primary years with a focus on teaching academics through the arts, engaging the intellect, social/emotional capacities and determination

- inspiration in the high school years and focus on truth and unfolding ability to discern and judge with moral aptitude.

The Steiner curriculum is also arranged in ‘main lesson’ blocks.

“Students are deeply immersed in a subject for three to four weeks in two hour blocks each day. Our aim is to encourage a love of learning, and a real understanding of the world in which we live. Curriculum content, cognitive development and skill building are approached through pictorial and imaginative presentation, embodying narrative, creative writing, visual arts, music, drama and movement,” explains Tracey.

Another distinguishing feature of Steiner education is the importance of the class teacher period in the primary years, with the same teacher moving through the years (as far as possible) with their class.

“This fosters a deep and trusting child/teacher relationship which in turn results in strong educational outcomes,” says Tracey.

"Steiner teachers are not educating students for a future unknown job, but for life long learning in a changing world, the unfolding of the individual and the ability to truly know oneself" - Tracey, SEA
"Our aim is to encourage a love of learning, and real understanding of the world in which we live"

As with most alternative schooling, there is always a concern about the transition to traditional education later in life. Whilst research in this area is limited, a recent study found that students from alternative schools (including Steiner) adjust better to higher education - they report less anxiety and depression symptoms, and show greater life satisfaction and academic achievement.

Steiner education is recognised by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority as meeting all educational outcomes by the end of Year 10. It's for this reason Tracey suggests that students generally have little trouble changing schools. However, she does make an exception for the younger primary years.

“The younger primary years is where the largest differences occur in curriculum content. If a parent chooses a Steiner school from kindergarten, they should commit to the primary years, at least up to the end of Class 3, as our approach differs from the intense academic approach of the early primary years where we focus strongly building the foundations for all future subjects,” says Tracey.

This view has been reflected in a number of studies that have found that students of Steiner education perform below average in the early primary school years, but catch up, or perform better, by the age of about ten.

So, is there a type of child that is best suited to Steiner education?

In Tracey’s opinion, absolutely not - Steiner education suits all children. However, Tracey does accept that Steiner education might not suit all parents.

“It is the parents who must decide if Steiner education is right for their family as Steiner communities expect parents to uphold the values and ethos of the school in their family life. If values are too divergent, the child cannot feel supported by both school and home; there should be congruence."

Every Steiner school is independent and must follow federal and state legislation and registration requirements, therefore there is stringent oversight of all aspects of schooling. Although SEA is not an accrediting body, it is the peak body representing Australian member schools.
Homeschooling in Australia is increasing in popularity, with more than 10,000 registered families and thousands more ‘off the grid’.

Rachael Clark, mother of four, blogger and home educator, made the decision to start homeschooling in 2010 when her eldest child, Jemima, was nearing the end of year four.

“Homeschooling became our only option when the school system started to impact dramatically on the emotional health of my eldest child” says Rachael.

“We spent some years working with, and within, the school to try to accommodate my daughter’s needs (but really, all that amounted to was her needing to fit into their quite restrictive system). For over two years we met weekly with a team of professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, speech pathologist and more) in an effort to help her”.

Like many in Rachael’s position, her home-life during that period became a constant war zone.

“I would resort to saying to Jemima “just do what you’re told”, and she would cry and retreat, loosing self-esteem. I later realised that she didn’t know how to respond or verbalise her emotions, and the messages she was receiving from adults was that she wasn’t good enough or there was something wrong with her.”
It was later discovered through testing that Rachael’s daughter is incredibly gifted with a very high IQ.

“The school system just couldn’t engage and stimulate her as they are limited with time, techniques, knowledge and resources."

“The positive changes in her were more than I could have believed would happen. The impact and changes it had on our whole family were things we hadn’t even considered when we chose to pull her from school.”

But it wasn’t without its challenges, particularly for Rachael who was new to the role of home-educator.

She initially began homeschooling by imitating the school system and following their strict education program. It wasn’t until she discovered that there were many ways to learn and be educated, that she realised that Jemima learned (and thought) differently.

“I sought out some of the alternative methods of education like Montessori, Steiner, Classical, Waldorf. After a number of years implementing some different aspects, we decided on implementing the unschooling style.”

Unschooling follows the premise of trusting children and creating a mentor type relationship to support and empower children to become all they want to be.

“Mentoring my children, learning with them, encouraging them, offering opportunities to learn more and follow their passion is a more empowering and holistic way to live. It has enhanced our whole family life.”

Families that choose to homeschool generally into one of two categories - those who feel they have no choice, and those who believe it’s better than traditional education.

But what about socialisation? Are children who are homeschooled given the same opportunities to develop socially as those who are educated in a formal school environment?

Fortunately, the availability of online social networking has made it easier than ever for home-educators and children to connect with other home-schooled families. In fact, most home-schooled families see it as something they need to seek out for their children to ensure they aren’t missing out in some way.

Rachael’s views on socialisation and the opportunities provided in a formal school environment are strong.

“The playground at school is not the ideal place to learn appropriate social skills. It is important to remember that the socialisation process begins at home with our children learning how to interact, and the value of interacting, from other adults. Historically, the social needs of children have not been met through exposure to hundreds of other children in one place.

Their needs were met through interaction with their direct and extended families and as they mingled among the community in which they lived. We model social skills when we interact with each other, family, friends, neighbours and other people when going about our daily business.”

The other common misconception about homeschooling is poor academic performance and tertiary acceptance.

However, the latest research data from overseas actually reveals that home-schooled children do exceedingly well academically (often outperforming mainstream students).

In fact, homeschooled children often access university courses online much earlier than their school peers.

For example, Jemima very successfully completed a Robotics course and other degrees designed for tertiary aged students.

Whilst home-schooling is not easy - considering the time commitment, the need for flexibility, the financial constraints and external pressures/attitudes from peers - there is certainly a place for it in the broader education ‘system’.

As for Rachael, her only regret - “not having started homeschool earlier”.

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**EDUCATION REVOLUTION**

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